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SUBJECT: OFFICIALS TOUT VIETNAM-CHINA BORDER DEMARCATION COMPLETION

¶1. (SBU) Summary: While Vietnam and China continue to dispute sovereignty over the South China Sea, the two sides recently completed the process of demarcation of their land border. On a recent trip to the border province of Lang Son, DCM was informed by local officials that Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao and Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung will celebrate the completion of the project later this month in a ceremony on the border. End Summary.

A Decade of Work Laying Out Border

¶2. (SBU) Border negotiators on December 31, 2008 announced that they completed demarcating the entire 1,400 kilometer land border between China with 2,000 border markers. Deputy Foreign Minister Vu Dung, who headed the Vietnamese side to the negotiations, said the developments are in keeping with international law and the treaty the two sides signed in 1999 establishing joint committees to study and negotiate the technical aspects of delimiting the border and complete their work by January 1, 2009. Dung stated that border demarcation and marker planting in 2007 was slower than in previous years because the remaining areas were "sensitive and disputed for a very long time." The two contentious areas reportedly included areas around the Ban Gioc Waterfall and Bac Luan and Quay Son Rivers.

¶3. (SBU) During a January 8-9 visit by DCM to the border province of Lang Son, Chairman of the provincial People's Committee Vi Van Thanh told DCM that, although the formal border demarcation was just completed, the border between the province and Guang Xi, China was "stable and well-known." Thanh said the formal completion of border demarcation is an important step between the two countries in increasing cooperation and trade. He noted that the Friendship Border Gate in Lang Son province has been designated by the GVN as one of the main border points for trade with China.

Top Leaders to Mark Completion of Border

¶4. (SBU) Vice Chairman of the People's Committee in Nguyen Van Thanh said Vietnamese PM Dung and China's PM Wen Jiaobao will commemorate the completion of the border demarcation in a celebration set to occur before the lunar new year (January 26) at the Friendship Border Gate which connects Lang Son with Guang Xi province in China.

¶5. (SBU) The Hanoi-Beijing joint declaration issued on December 31 said completion of border demarcation and marker planting is "a great historical moment in the Vietnam-China relationship." For his part, Deputy Foreign Minister Dung said it is "the first time Vietnam and China have defined their land border by themselves with a system of documents, maps and a complete national border line marker." In the near future, the two sides likely will sign agreements on developing tourism in the area and on establishing "free travel areas" near the mouth of the Bac Luan River for the boats of people who live in the border region, Dung added.

¶6. (SBU) In 2009, Hanoi and Beijing will continue to negotiate the contents of a protocol on border demarcation and marker planting, and on an appendix, including the maps and profiles the two sides have reached over the past ten years. They also plan to negotiate new border management regulations and an international border management agreement.

